

Why Chesterton and Revolution?



Someone asked me a question yesterday via the [GKChestertonQuote.com](#) site: If “revolution” is so often used as a leftist and communist idea, why would a Christian author like G.K. Chesterton issue a call to revolution like “[Pray for Revolution?](#)”

To paraphrase Chesterton in *Manalive*, a revolution is always a return. A revolution is a radical change, a re-turning to some ideal that was lost. As Christians, the idea is that what we have lost was Eden, what we hope for is the Kingdom of God. In our fallen world, to realize these ideals in the now, we must radically change ourselves in order for that to happen.

“To the orthodox there must always be a case for revolution; for in the hearts of men God has been put under the feet of Satan. In the upper world hell once rebelled against heaven. But in this world heaven is rebelling against hell. For the orthodox there can always be a revolution; for a revolution is a restoration. At any instant you may strike a blow for the perfection which no man has seen since Adam.” *Orthodoxy*

Revolution is not the sole property of any particular political ideal. Perhaps it is ultimately alien even for political ideals.

Near the end of *Manalive*, Innocent Smith has a conversation with a Russian revolutionist:

[Smith:] “I am a revolutionist. But don’t you see that all these real leaps and destructions and escapes are only attempts to get back to Eden– to something we have had, to something we at least have heard of? Don’t you see one only breaks the fence or shoots the moon in order to get HOME?”

“No,” I answered after due reflection, “I don’t think I should accept that.”

“Ah,” he said with a sort of a sigh, “then you have explained a second thing to me.”

“What do you mean?’ I asked; “what thing?”

“Why your revolution has failed.”

The more I read of Chesterton the more I see a revolutionary philosophy running through it; not a philosophy that is new and revolutionary, like independence in the American colonies or communism in the formerly imperial Russia, but a philosophy that is based on revolution itself as a fundamental truth of human history and philosophy. We cannot create an ideal heaven on Earth, so we must always be seeking to improve what we have.

To get started reading the revolutionary works of Chesterton I would suggest the essay “[The Wind in the Trees](#)” (From *Tremendous Trifles*), *Orthodoxy* (of which the seventh chapter is called “The Eternal Revolution,”) and *Manalive*.

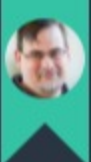
There are hundreds more insights into Chesterton’s idea of revolution, but they are scattered throughout his works. Perhaps someday I’ll have a book actually on Chesterton on revolution, not just a book [inspired by Chesterton’s idea of revolution](#).



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Paul Nowak is a husband and father of 7, who also happens to be a writer and author. He has written [The Way of the Christian Samurai](#) among [other books](#).

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